
22. In partnership with the NC Senior Consumer Fraud Task Force and NC4A, DAAS will increase awareness of consumer fraud by encouraging a more comprehensive dissemination of consumer fraud alerts to those seniors who are most at risk in each region and by implementing an effective Victims Assistance Program that reaches at least 50 North Carolina counties.

A 1999 survey conducted by AARP found that consumers over 50 are disproportionately vulnerable to telemarketing fraud. Particularly for those who are retired and living on a fixed income, losing assets to fraud artists can have a devastating financial and psychological impact. DAAS and the NC Department of Justice (DOJ) have worked together for many years to fight consumer fraud aimed at older North Carolinians.

In 1998, DAAS joined forces with AARP NC and the State Attorney General's Office to establish the Senior Consumer Fraud Task Force, composed of representatives from federal, State, and local law enforcement, aging advocates, the aging network, State and local Better Business Bureaus, US postal inspectors, and crime prevention agencies. To enhance the safety of seniors, the Task Force will continue to support and expand its current achievements.

Led by DAAS and DOJ, the Task Force has already developed preventive programs to:

- identify consumer fraud and deceptive trade practices in North Carolina in order to enhance awareness and prevention
- educate older North Carolinians about fraud, how to avoid being victimized, and what to do if they are defrauded
- use volunteers as a resource for law enforcement in the fight against fraud
- link various agencies to provide updated information on fraud and deceptive practices occurring in the State that target seniors.

DAAS is also developing a brochure on fraud and how to prevent it, which will be made available to all regions/counties in the State and distributed through senior centers and other service providers, at SCAM Jams, and through religious congregations and civic organizations. DAAS and the State Attorney General's Office have also staffed a telemarketing fraud unit, the Consumer Protection Division of the NC Department of Justice, through a grant received from the Governor's Crime Control and Safety Office.

People who have been victimized by scammers are at great risk of being victimized again. In SFY 2005–06, DAAS and the Attorney General's Office developed a Victims Assistance Program that uses trained volunteers in the fight against fraud. Among their tasks is assessment of victims' level of functioning, development of a safety plan, identification of community and social supports, and referral to professionals when appropriate. Volunteers who have had criminal background checks receive intense training to help them become effective mentors and "buddies" to victims of fraud. Volunteers' active presence in the community will help with the early detection of signs and symptoms of fraud among vulnerable seniors.

23. DHHS will continue to support new initiatives such as the NC New Organizational Vision Award and the Medication Aide Registry Program that address current shortages and growing demand for direct-care workers in long-term care settings as a result of the aging of the population.

Direct-care workers are certified nursing assistants, personal care attendants, and other unlicensed paraprofessionals who provide 90 percent of the hands-on daily care for persons receiving formal long-term services and supports, whether at home or in a residential setting. An adequate, well trained, and stable direct-care workforce is important to quality